



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Wadhurst Dramatic Club

'A Bunch of Amateurs' a comedy by Nick Newman & Ian Hislop

Wadhurst Commemoration Hall

Saturday 25th May 2019

Director: Russ Kirton

A busy night, al fresco tables and chairs in the car park on a perfect May evening – so pleased – with such hard work put into this production, the matinee being cancelled disappointing. F of H most welcoming and my seat was perfect thank you.

The good humorous, colourful front cover on the A5 programme was nicely collated but only showed the NODA crest, but sadly missing the wording!

Fading, flagging Hollywood egotistic star Jefferson Steele arrives at LHR for a photographic welcome. He is expecting to perform in the Bard's Stratford, the revered 'King Lear'. Sadly, he finds the theatre is in the sleepy Suffolk village of Stratford St John, he will have the indignity of rehearsing and performing in a barn, his accommodation is in the local b and b with no ensuite facilities, run by enthusiastic thespian, a star struck landlady Mary, and his vehicle eventually – a mobility scooter. The amateur group is headed by passionate Dorothy Nettle, making a last-ditch appeal to save their beloved theatre from developers. Steele is tested to his limits with much shouting and bad language but over time and the arrival of his daughter Jessica he discovers some truths about himself along with his inner 'Lear'. Full of great comedy, fast pace, some wonderful characters, intermingled with a delightful troupe of minstrels strutting the stage with several verses of melodic rounds of 'Loudly Sing Cuckoo' and unlike its title, a most professional production. A few smart prompts didn't detract, with Denise Beedell on the book.

With a design from Colin, Nance and Jan a first-class set was constructed by John Bush. A beamed barn with excellent perspective, a stone rear wall was created and dressed with appropriate furniture, a costume trunk and various chairs. Good theatrical props gathered together by Elizabeth Young, Tina Reed and Muriel Williams, including the well driven mobility vehicle, a large swear box which should have been really heavy and great drapes from the costume trunk being one or two. Two useful hinged flats were placed either side and on turning produced other scenes – a breakfast room with wall ducks and painted light fittings and bedroom, for the misinterpreted bedroom scene with the physio session. I particularly liked the signage of the 'Stratford St John Barn Theatre' and the Next production 'King Lear'. The lighting design and sound effects as usual with JB's precision and together with John Clark and Bill Johnson, well managed.

Jill Haskell and Penny Bones managed the combination of medieval and modern with good finishing touches adding comic wigs too.

The seven main characters excelled in their characterisations and together with Russ Kirton's direction gave the audience much enjoyment and laughter. Amanda Dann put a strong stamp on her character in charge of theatrical affairs of Stratford St John – some great lines,

movement and comedy there. Merlin Beedell a natural in this role, very expressive with his arms and comedy mishaps playing 'I really think I'm good enough to play King Lear' thespian Nigel Dewbury. Joe Trotter enjoyed his role in a different genre than in his recent 'Private Peaceful' appearance. His part of Denis Dobbins showed a mischief and I liked the boiler suit and bandana appearance. Mary Plunkett – what a landlady! Xan Kite threw herself into this wonderful part of adoration of a fading star with extremely funny movements, facials and costuming. Her hair bunches appearing at all angles, great colour clashes and those matching shoes brilliant. Tony Bailey produced a strong, love me Jefferson Steel with a well-maintained US accent, fast and loud script, good natural movement, who in the end adjusted and mellowed rather nicely. Estranged streetwise daughter Jessica's arrival softened our lead with Annamay Porter-Reed most credible, also well performed was Holly Sturman's attractive businesswoman, sponsor come physio Lauren Bell. Neill McKenzie supported with the cameo Duke of Albany role and the heard but not seen Journalists were Tom and Joe Madden.

Yes, there was a fair amount of bad language but with natural frustration understandable and to be honest we hear so much in everyday life nowadays - it's in the streets, on TV and on film and by all accounts the Queen enjoyed the film version!

Always to those members not mentioned by name, without your support a production is not possible, so well done to you too.

A précis of this Review will be posted on the NODA website shortly.

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